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ABSTRACT

A humanistic approach to the mainstreaming of handicapped children in day care programs is discussed. The importance of (1) delineating the total developmental pattern of the child, (2) the child's perception of himself and others as it relates to the teacher in the teaching process, and (3) curriculum development in terms of six basic needs (physical security, love, creative expression, cognitive mastery, social competency and self-worth) are emphasized. How the basic needs of children are specifically related to handicapped children is pointed out. (Author/RH)

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Humanistic Education and the Handicapped Child:

Implications for Quality Day Care Programs

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Introduction

Education in a free society is a constantly changing, constantly evolving process. At no time in the history of our country, have educators been more involved in the improvement of technology and materials to meet the learning needs of our children. More recently, educators have refocused their attention upon the issue of finding the young handicapped child in the educative process. The issue of humanistic education directs the attention of educators to assure sound physical growth of young children, to foster a good self-image in children, to create caring relationships among children, to guide children to value a world of diversity and change, and to validate the experiences and feelings of children.

The purpose of this article is to examine a merger of two methods that are presently having a major impact in Early Childhood Education, Humanistic Education and the Mainstreaming of Handicapped Young Children into quality Day Care Programs.

Quality Day Care Programs

The past decade witnessed the unprecedented growth of Day Care Programs in the United States. Statistics show that more than 800,000+ children between the ages of 2 and 5 are currently enrolled in Day Care Programs (U.S. Census, 1980). These children may come from wealthy, middle-income, or low-income families. Whatever the economic level of the family, when no adult is available to care for the young child, a quality Day Care Program may offer nurturing and educational experiences (Butler, 1970).

During the preschool years, quality Day Care Programs can support a young child's development by offering the child the kind of care he receives from his own parents and by providing meaningful, social experiences for children with competent,

concerned adults and peers. Quality Day Care Programs, geared to the unique needs, abilities, interests, motivations, and developmental maturity of each child, can provide the multiplicity of challenges that summon each child to experiment with, explore, and manipulate his environment with zest and excitement. These programs, also, can and do support the child's family by involving parents in the program, thus, making parenthood a pleasant and rewarding opportunity rather than an extra burden.

Humanistic Education

As educators continue to examine and re-examine those elements that promote or eradicate a conducive learning environment of young children, professional assistance must be offered to help administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and community people to become more humane in the conduct of their educational programs.

If educators want to humanize the process of learning during the early years, they must make a systematic search to identify those elements that enhance or destroy effective learning of young children. Currently, special attention is being given to handicapped children attending Day Care Programs. These children suffer conditions which not only preclude the development of skills in the domains of learning but also demand specialized teaching. A more humanistic approach to quality Day Care Programs will be needed to teach these children to learn, to value learning, and to integrate a sense of self-worth in their developing personalities.

For the purpose of communication, we should like to provide a working definition of terms to be used in this context. The definition of Humanistic Education that appears most relevant here is one used by Valett (1977) to wit:

> Humanistic Education is concerned with the development of the total person. It is concerned with designing and providing learning experience that will help people of all ages, and in all stages of life, continue to develop their uniquely human potentials. It is concerned with facilitating our growth and changing our behavior so that we may become a more, wholesome, balanced, self-actualized and responsible.

The emphasis of this kind of educational process is on the needs and aspirations of the individual as opposed to the need of the society to perpetuate its social and cultural values.

Valett (1978) goes on to describe the difference between humanized education and traditional education and points out that most contemporary educational programs are concerned with providing the learner with the basic skills necessary for insuring the survival of the culture into which he is born. These skills have been identified as reading, writing, calculating, the solving of arithmetic problems, and the acquisition of some level of capability to work.

These kinds of skills are necessary tools for people who are in the process of learning to understand their environment and who need to develop technology to enable them to survive in an alien or simplistic world. We have developed technology that allows us to survive and actually explore physical worlds that were beyond our comprehension at the time the thesis upon which traditional education was based. The complexity of our present society may be due, in part, to the fact we have expended more energy in exploring the world around us than we have in understanding the uniqueness of the human organism. Humanistic education attempts to integrate all learning in meaningful ways that enables the learner to adapt more effectively to himself, others and his environment, and to play, care for, aspire to create and realize a more wholesome way of life for everyone.

Mainstreaming Handicapped Children

According to Carl Rogers (1969), the goal of education is one which assists students to become individuals who are able to take self-initiated action and be responsible for their actions, who are capable of intelligent choice and self-

direction, who work for, not the approval of others, but in terms of their own socialized process. Within the mainstreaming paradigm, mainstreaming means the designing of educational programs including placement and teaching strategies to meet the optimum potential for learning of each child as indicated from appropriate testing and observational techniques. It is incumbent upon educators to critically analyze facets of the child developmental patterns for clues of how best to prepare the child to utilize all of his potentials for learning about himself, others, and the environment in which he lives.

Historically, educational programs for handicapped children have operated on the premise that when a child demonstrated some of the symptoms, usually, based on the total score earned on I.Q. tests, he should be labelled and placed in a special class setting. Little consideration is given in testing or teaching to other areas of development as the social, language, and perceptual-motor behaviors.

In order for mainstreaming to be effective, it will demand a humanistic approach. There will have to be changes in the three critical areas of the educational process upon which we identify: (1) children with learning needs, (2) the quality of teacher interaction with these children, and (3) the actual teaching strategies used to intervene on the handicapping conditions. We can view these three areas in light of Valett's aforementioned description of Humanistic Education in three coordinates (i.e., individual total development, facilitation of growth and behavioral change, and quality educational program).

Procedural Steps

The first step in the Mainstreaming process is the identification of the specific learning needs of the individual child. Humanistic education theory

would mandate that this identification process should be made in terms of the total developmental pattern of the child. Given the limitations of test instruments that have validity for predicting learning success as it relates to development, it seems in our opinion, that historical information of the child should be of vital concern in the examination process. We know, for example, that children who demonstrate similar behaviors on psychological and educational tests, often, do so for different etiological reasons. Therefore, unless we know when the indications of the handicapping condition was first noted and what other areas of the child's behavior were affected, we cannot plan educational programs to meet all the affected areas of the handicapping condition. Psychologists and educators who are experienced in working with young handicapped children are aware that too often educational strategies fail because the child is unable to respond to the tasks as designed. This failure often reflects the lack of attention in the teaching strategy to the secondary behaviors of the child. For example, children who demonstrate failure to learn to read are often assigned to reading readiness tasks involving recognition and discrimination of letter form. Historical and observational information relating to this child could reveal he cannot button his coat or tie his shoes or use eating utensils appropriately. These behaviors would suggest that the child has not made the appropriate visual-motor matches for non-verbal learning experiences. Therefore, the expectation that he make the matches for letter and word matches (verbal learning) are inappropriate. We are not suggesting that this verbal learning should be delayed until he has mastered the nonverbal aspects, but we are suggesting that the teaching strategy or Individual Teaching Plan should include strategies to develop these competencies. Learning is developmental and requires sequential approaches to attain success.

Another facet relating to the importance of using history and observational information as a part of the diagnostic-remedial plan is evidenced in the approach to deaf and blind children who are being considered as mainstreaming candidates. According to Piaget, the first two years of life of the child are spent in collecting and interpreting information taken in from the senses. When a child is deprived of information from one sensory pathway, we can expect a profound impact on his total learning potential. This does not mean these children will necessarily perform within the retarded range on I.Q. test, but it does mean that when it does, other areas of their development should be carefully evaluated before the labelling and programming are attempted. It also would suggest that for some of these children, there may have been restrictions on their motor, perceptual-motor, and social behaviors that have limited their learning experiences; consequently, some of the skills they have accomplished may be too ideocentric to support new learning in a large group.

The point of this part of the discussion is that diagnostic and screening programs involving young handicapped should include more information than their ability to perform on standardized tests. We do not know all of the effects of handicapping conditions on the total development of young children. However, we do know that contrary to adults, these kinds of deficits appear to affect more than one area of the childs behavior profile; therefore, we need more inclusive diagnostic procedures to provide specific information necessary for the teaching plan.

The second consideration from Valett's model is the importance of the child's perception of himself and others as it relates to the teacher in the teaching process. Braun and Lasher (1978) state that it is of primary importance that teachers of young handicapped children first learn to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and to determine how she/he will use these to deal with such variables as the use of peer teachers, adult teacher aides, and parent involvement

in the teaching process. Too often, teachers tend to view their classroom as miniature empires in which they reign as soverign-supreme. They set the goals for academic and social learning, they dispense the knowledge and decide the standards. Normal children have the capacity to survive in this autocratic kingdom by using techniques not available to handicapped children.

Moreover, Braun and Lasher (1978) suggest that teaching young children involves the creating of a learning environment in which the teacher: (1) builds a level of trust that allows the children to learn to depend on people and the classroom environment; (2) share autonomy or teach children to make choices, to exercise their will, and to experience a sense of authority and independence; (3) encourage initiative by guiding children to a realization and utilization of their strengths and weaknesses that permits them to interact among themselves and with adults in positive rewarding ways; and (4) help children to establish common concerns about classroom interactions that permit them to recognize and respond to individual differences in productive ways.

The third step in the process of developing a humanistic education approach to mainstreaming young handicapped children is the curriculum itself. Valett would have us devise the curriculum around the six needs basic to human development: physical security, love, creative expression, cognitive mastery, social competency and self-worth. While the teaching and learning experience for <u>all</u> children should be concerned with providing learning in these areas, it is vital that young handicapped children have these experiences.

His first level is <u>physical security</u> which range from good physical health and basic self-help skills to food and balanced diet. Children who suffer from handicapping conditions such as crippling disorders (cerebral palsy, loss of limbs, deafness, blindness, moderate to severe perceptual disfunction or combinations of these disabilities) may need some adaptive equipment such as wheel chairs, standing boards, walking rails and boards, adaptive manipulative devices, trampolines etc. These equipment should be arranged to permit optimum facility of movement in meaningful

learning experiences. Isolate drills and manipulative devices that do not allow for independent take-over are inappropriate to this concept of physical need.

The second level is the need to love and be loved by a responsible human being. According to Glasser (1966), this is basic normal emotional health. Most school programs are plagued by the lack of discipline, inability to respond to limits and to control emotional outbursts in children. Too many of these children are being labelled as emotionally disturbed without due consideration to the family style and previous experiences of the child. In our opinion, all classrooms, but particularly those which educate young children, should have a planned curriculum for teaching affective behavior to children. It seems to us that educators are forgetting a basic change in the life style of today's children. By far, the greater majority of children in today's society come from homes where the parents or parent work. This necessarily limits the amount of time adults spend with the child as well as the quality of the adult-child interaction. Parents are more likely to be preoccupied with their job or tired from the work experience during the time allotted for the child.

Children with handicapping conditions have often been sheltered from social experiences that preclude the ability to develop an awareness of themselves as individuals separate and distinct from the significant others in their environment. They cannot be expected to learn to relate to others, until they first learn they are in control of way to be and to allow us to be, or not to be, in relation to themselves. This should be the first step in the educational plan for every child.

The third level is creative expression. Once the child has learned to use his senses to explore his environment, he has to learn to internalize the experience in terms of pleasure of rejection that is derived from his unique interaction. Creativity should be guided, it can not be taught. The purpose behind it is to allow the child to share the uniqueness of self with others. Therefore, creative expression is devoid of norms, and judgmental grades are inappropriate.

The next level is cognitive mastery. Safford (1978) outlined the learning needs for several categories of children who should be considered for mainstreaming in Day Care programs including children with speech and language disorders, hearing impairments, visually impairments, mental retardation, learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, behavioral disorders, and physical, neurological, and multiple-handicapping conditions. Ms. Safford has been very thorough in listing specific curricular needs for each category of disability. To unsophisticated personnel just becoming involved with the problems of young handicapped children, the diversity of the needs of these children may seem insurmountable. The truth is that as teachers learn to respect the role of perceptual and cognitive development to the learning of academic skills, the easier it is to plan curriculum to meet the learning needs of all the children.

Strategies for Change

In responding to the young handicapped child, the physical organization of the traditional classroom will need to be changed. Learning Centers should be designed to improve the child's perceptual experiences in recognizing, discriminating, associating, and remembering visual and auditory noverbal and verbal information. Through this kind of arrangement, retarded, deaf, blind, learning disabled and some children with emotional problems can use the same materials in a similar manner as they progress in their cognitive development.

The essence of the teaching approach is on teaching to the many levels of readiness of the child. Most of the teacher's time is spent in observing and planning learning experiences as opposed to telling, showing, and evaluating. This specific planning allows for structured input of the information as well as structured output of the task, thus, affording an opportunity for self and peer evaluation. More important, the instructional procedure promotes more peer

interaction, thus, providing the atmosphere to promote the affective, cognitive, and psychomotor abilities of the child in ways the child can experience the interaction.

By relating the learning needs to several areas of the child's development and planning and teaching strategies to provide direct intervention on all the affected areas, the child is able to relate to what is happening to him in ways that promote integration of the new experience. Learning materials, task presentation, and the evaluation are intricately related to what the child already knows.

Since handicapped children usually demonstrate more behavior that is similar to their peers than behavior that is different from their peers, the teaching process allows teachers to concentrate on the child's integrated strengths rather than focusing on the isolated weaknesses. Another advantage to this kind of programming is that it, also, allows normal children to focus more on the strengths of the young handicapped child. Thus, the child becomes more aware of the individual differences among people in positive rather than negative ways.

In its most elementary form, social competency among children is a measure of children's ability to interact with each other in "acceptable" ways. The judgment of this interaction is usually dependent upon how others view the self. In humanistic education, the task is to get the child to interpret the moral and ethical values as behaviors he omits because they express a better him rather than for social approval. Again, the concept of responsibility for self predetermines the quality of responsibility to others.

For young handicapped children, it should be stressed that the presence of a handicapping condition does not preclude this dual responsibility since the handicapping condition does not diminish the humanness of a person. Helping handicapped children to separate the handicapping behavior and learn to use adaptive behaviors to circumvent social failures in ways that allow for the

presentation of self to be a wholistic experience to others. Therefore, the earlier handicapped children are exposed to this kind of reality in the social world, the broader their experience in dealing with that world in healthy ways will be.

Summary

If Quality Day Care Programs are to move toward humanism, then humanism must become important to all of us - administrators, supervisors, teachers, children, and community individuals. Deciding that humanism is important is not enough. Everyone is in favor of programs for young children, both non-handicapped and handicapped, but not everyone is committed to them. There is a vast difference between an intellectual acceptance of an idea and the belief that it is truly important enough to warrant acting upon it.

A commitment to humanism calls for a shift in thinking from self to learner. It means we have to be less concerned with what we do and more concerned about what happens in the hearts and minds of young children especially handicapped ones. A concern for humanism calls for the development of deep sensitivity on the part of administrators, supervisors, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support services personnel so that they may become aware of the consequences of their behavior in the internal lives of young non-handicapped and handicapped children.

Mainstreaming, while expressing education's attempt to respond to a wider range of human need, must be approached as an evolving program that will need to be taken one step at a time, if we are intending to be successful in our efforts.

As you continue to develop and deliver educational programs to young, non-handicapped and handicapped children, ponder the questions raised by Tumin (1967):

What do we want our children to become? What do we want our children to come to value? What do we want them to be able to feel and see and hear and smell and touch? . . . What do we want them to understand about themselves and the world of nature and man? How do we want them to behave toward other human beings? . . .

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